

The Three Feathers

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

Once upon a time there was a king who had three sons, two of whom were clever and intelligent, but the third one did not talk very much, was simple minded, and the only name they gave him was *the Simpleton*.

When the king became old and weak, and thought that he was nearing his end, he did not know which of his sons should inherit the kingdom after him, so he said to them, "Go forth, and the one of you who brings me the finest carpet, he shall be king after my death."

So there would be no dispute among them, he led them to the front of his castle, blew three feathers into the air, and said, "As they fly, so shall you go."

The one feather flew to the east, the other to the west, and the third feather flew straight ahead, falling quickly to the ground after going only a short distance. The one brother went to the right, the other to the left, and they laughed at the Simpleton who had to stand there where the third feather had fallen.

The Simpleton sat down and was sad. Then he suddenly noticed that there was a trapdoor next to his feather. He lifted it up, found a stairway, and climbed down inside. He came to another door and knocked on it, upon which he heard someone calling out from within:

Maiden green and small,
Hopping toad,
Hopping toad's puppy,
Hop to and fro,
Quickly see who is outside.

The door opened, and he saw a big, fat toad sitting there, surrounded by a large number of little toads. The fat toad asked what he wanted.

The Simpleton answered, "I would like the most beautiful and finest carpet."

Then the fat toad called to a young toad, saying:

Maiden green and small,
Hopping toad,
Hopping toad's puppy,
Hop to and fro,
Bring me the large box.

The young toad brought the box, and the fat toad opened it, then gave the Simpleton a carpet from it. It was so beautiful and so fine, the like of which could never have been woven in the world above. He thanked the toad and climbed back out.

Now the other two thought that their brother was so stupid that he would not find anything to bring home.

"Why should we spend a lot of effort looking for a carpet?" they said, so they took some pieces of course cloth from the first shepherd's wife they came to, and took these back home to the king.

At the same time they returned home, the Simpleton arrived, bringing his beautiful carpet. When the king saw it, he was astounded, and said, "It is only right that the kingdom should go to my youngest son."

However, the two other sons gave their father no peace, saying that it would be impossible for the Simpleton to become king, because he lacked understanding in all things. They asked him to declare another contest.

Then the father said, "He who brings me the most beautiful ring shall inherit the kingdom." Leading the three brothers outside, he blew the three feathers into the air that they were to follow.

The two oldest brothers again went to the east and to the west, and the Simpleton's feather again flew straight ahead, falling down next to the door in the ground. Once again he climbed down to the fat toad and told it that he needed the most beautiful ring. The toad had the box brought out again and gave him from it a ring that glistened with precious stones and was so beautiful that no goldsmith on earth could have made it.

The two oldest brothers laughed at the Simpleton, who was going to look for a golden ring, and they took no effort at all. Instead, they drove the nails out of an old wagon ring and brought it to the king. However, when the Simpleton presented his ring, the king said once again, "The kingdom belongs to him."

The two oldest sons tormented the king endlessly, until finally he declared a third contest, saying that he who would bring home the most beautiful woman should have the kingdom.

Once again he blew the three feathers into the air and they flew in the same directions as before.

Without hesitating, the Simpleton went back to the fat toad and said, "I am supposed to take home the most beautiful woman."

"Oh!" answered the toad. "The most beautiful woman! She is not here at the moment, but you shall have her nonetheless."

The fat toad gave him a hollowed out yellow turnip, to which were harnessed six little mice.

The Simpleton said sadly, "What am I to do with this?"

The toad answered, "Just put one of my little toads inside it."

The he grabbed one of them from the group and set it inside the yellow coach. The little toad was scarcely inside when it turned into a beautiful young lady, the turnip into a coach, and the six mice into horses. He kissed her, raced away with the horses, and brought her to the king.

His brothers came along afterward. They had given no effort to find a beautiful woman, but simply brought along the first peasant women they had come upon.

After looking at them, the king said, "After my death the kingdom belongs to my youngest son."

However, the two oldest sons again deafened the king's ears with the cry, "We cannot allow the Simpleton to become king," and they demanded that the preference should go to the brother whose woman could jump through a hoop that was hanging in the middle of the hall.

They thought, "The peasant women will be able to do that very well. They are very strong, but the dainty lady will jump herself to death."

The old king gave in to this as well. The two peasant women did indeed jump through the hoop, but they were so plump that each one fell, breaking her thick arms and legs. Then the beautiful lady, that the Simpleton had brought home, jumped, and she jumped through the hoop as lightly as a deer.

After this all the protests had to stop. Thus the Simpleton received the crown, and he ruled wisely for a long time.

- Source: [Die Drei Federn](#), *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales -- Grimms' Fairy Tales), final edition (1857), no. 63.

- Translated by [D. L. Ashliman](#). © 2002.

- The Grimms learned this tale (and its variants) from a number of sources, including the Wild family, the Hassenpflug family, and Dorothea Viehmann (1755-1815).

- This tale was included in the first edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812). It was somewhat rewritten for the second edition (1819).

- Aarne-Thompson type 402, *The Animal Bride*. Tales of this type are found throughout the world.

Links to related sites

- The Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* include one additional tale of type 402: [The Poor Miller's Boy and the Cat](#) (no. 106).

- [Animal Brides: Folktales of Aarne-Thompson Type 402 and Related Stories](#). Additional tales of type 402.

- The Grimm Brothers' [Children's and Household Tales](#) (Grimms' Fairy Tales).

- The [Grimm Brothers' Home Page](#).

- D. L. Ashliman's **folktexts**, a library of folktales, folklore, fairy tales, and mythology.